United Nations S/PV.5564

Security Council

Sixty-first year

Provisional

5564th meeting

Thursday, 9 November 2006, 10 a.m.

New York

President:	Mr. Voto-Bernales	(Peru)
Members:	Argentina	Mr. Mayoral
	China	Mr. Liu Zhenmin
	Congo	Mr. Gayama
	Denmark	Ms. Løj
	France	Mr. De La Sablière
	Ghana	Nana Effah-Apenteng
	Greece	Mr. Vassilakis
	Japan	Mr. Shinyo
	Qatar	Mr. Al-Bader
	Russian Federation	Mr. Churkin
	Slovakia	Mr. Matulay
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Ms. Pierce
	United Republic of Tanzania	Mrs. Taj
	United States of America	Mr. Bolton

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

Letter dated 6 November 2006 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of Qatar to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2006/868)

Letter dated 7 November 2006 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of Azerbaijan to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2006/869)

Letter dated 8 November 2006 from the Permanent Representative of Cuba to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2006/871)

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the interpretation of speeches delivered in the other languages. The final text will be printed in the *Official Records of the Security Council*. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room C-154A.

06-60930 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 10.25 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

Letter dated 6 November 2006 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of Qatar to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2006/868)

Letter dated 7 November 2006 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of Azerbaijan to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2006/869)

Letter dated 8 November 2006 from the Permanent Representative of Cuba to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2006/871)

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I should like to inform the Council that I have received letters from the representatives of Algeria, Azerbaijan, Cuba, Egypt, Finland, Israel, Lebanon, Malaysia, Morocco, Norway, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Spain, Sudan, Tunisia and Yemen, requesting to be invited to participate in the consideration of the item on the Council's agenda. In conformity with the usual practice, I propose, with the consent of the Council, to invite those representatives to participate in the consideration of the item, without the right to vote, in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Charter and rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

At the invitation of the President, Mr. Carmon (Israel) took a seat at the Council table; the representatives of the other aforementioned countries took the seats reserved for them at the side of the Council Chamber.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I should like to inform the Council that I have received a letter dated 8 November 2006 from the Permanent Observer of Palestine to the United Nations, which will be issued as document S/2006/873, and which reads as follows:

"I have the honour to request that, in accordance with its previous practice, the Security Council invite the Permanent Observer of Palestine to the United Nations to participate in the meeting of the Security Council being held on Thursday, 9 November 2006, regarding the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question."

I propose, with the consent of the Council, to invite the Permanent Observer of Palestine to participate in the meeting in accordance with the rules of procedure and the previous practice in this regard.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

At the invitation of the President, Mr. Mansour (Palestine) took a seat at the Council table.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I should also like to inform the Council that I have received a letter dated 8 November 2006 from the representative of Senegal, which reads as follows:

"Under rule 39 of the provisional rules of procedure of the Security Council, I have the honour to request to be invited, as Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, to participate in the debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question."

In accordance with past practice in this matter, I propose that the Council extend an invitation under rule 39 of its provisional rules of procedure to the Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

I invite His Excellency Mr. Paul Badji to take the seat reserved for him at the side of the Council Chamber.

In accordance with the understanding reached in the Council's prior consultations, I shall take it that the Security Council agrees to extend an invitation under rule 39 of its provisional rules of procedure to Ms. Angela Kane, Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

The Security Council will begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

The Security Council is meeting in response to the requests contained in letters dated 6, 7 and 8 November 2006 from the representatives of Qatar, Azerbaijan and Cuba addressed to the President of the Security Council and circulated as documents S/2006/868, 869 and 871, respectively.

At this meeting, the Security Council will hear a briefing by Ms. Angela Kane, Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs.

I now give her the floor.

Ms. Kane (Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs): Yesterday morning, Wednesday 8 November, at approximately 5.30 a.m., Israeli forces fired 12 to 15 shells into north-west Beit Hanoun in the northern Gaza Strip. Shelling continued for 30 minutes and a house was destroyed. At least 18 Palestinians were killed, including eight children and seven women. A further 55 people were injured.

This incident followed a weeklong military operation undertaken by the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) in northern Gaza. The operation, code-named Autumn Clouds, began in the early hours of Wednesday 1 November, when the IDF entered Beit Hanoun in tanks and armoured vehicles. Israeli forces remained for a week and conducted arrests, door-to-door searches and military operations. During this period, the IDF controlled all movement in and out of Beit Hanoun and imposed a strict curfew on its inhabitants. According to the IDF, the operation was intended, "to prevent and disrupt the launching of rockets at Israel and to damage the terror infrastructure in the Beit Hanoun area". The IDF withdrew from Beit Hanoun on Tuesday 7 November.

According to the World Health Organization, 82 Palestinians were killed during the operations in Gaza between 1 and 8 November. Of those killed, 21 were children, 12 were women and 49 were men. A further 260 Palestinians were injured. According to the IDF, 57 of those killed in Gaza this week were "armed terrorists". The IDF also recovered a large number of weapons. One Israeli soldier was killed and at least one other was injured during the military operations in Gaza.

Palestinian militants continued to fire rockets into Israel during the week. According to the Government of Israel, 52 rockets and mortars were fired towards Israel between 31 October and 6 November, of which 35 detonated in Israel, notably in the cities of Sderot and Ashkelon. At least four Israeli civilians were injured by these rockets. At least three rockets landed today, but no one was hurt.

The humanitarian situation in Beit Hanoun deteriorated over the course of the week. Most areas of the town were without electricity and water, and there has been extensive infrastructure damage. At least 18 homes, a mosque and non-governmental organization offices were demolished, and a further 150 homes and nine commercial properties were damaged. The hospital continued to function, but primary health care services ceased to operate, as health staff were unable to leave their homes.

United Nations agencies and the International Committee of the Red Cross were able to provide food, water, powdered milk, fuel and hygiene kits on three occasions during the week, when the IDF lifted the curfew briefly to allow humanitarian access. On 3 November, two volunteer paramedics of the Palestinian Red Crescent Society died following IDF fire received in Beit Lahiya while performing their emergency medical duties. The individuals concerned and their means of transport were clearly marked with a distinctive emblem conferring the protection of the Geneva Conventions.

Since the launching of the IDF operation on 1 November, the United Nations has been in contact with the Israeli Government at the highest levels to express concern about the situation in Gaza. The Prime Minister of Israel gave assurances to the Secretary-General over the weekend that no operation would be launched that was not essential to stop the firing of rockets by militants. On Tuesday, the IDF announced that the Beit Hanoun incursion was concluding. Yesterday, however, the Israeli artillery continued attacks.

The United Nations was in contact with members of the Israeli Government again yesterday to reiterate the call for restraint and the urgent need to protect civilians.

The Secretary-General publicly expressed his shock to learn about yesterday's incident and extended his condolences to the families of the victims. His Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Alvaro de Soto, also issued a statement the same day. Prime Minister Olmert and Defense Minister Peres yesterday expressed their regret over the deaths of

Palestinian civilians. Prime Minister Olmert also announced the suspension of IDF artillery fire pending an investigation of the circumstances of this latest incident.

Yesterday, Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas and Prime Minister Ismael Haniyeh postponed their talks on the establishment of a new Palestinian Government "until further notice". The talks had been intense during the past week, and the Prime Minister and the President had agreed in principle on Monday to a formula for the composition and programme of a new Government.

In the meantime, in Damascus, Khaled Mashaal, the exiled leader of Hamas, called for renewed attacks on Israel. He urged other militant groups to join the struggle.

The incident that occurred in Beit Hanoun on Wednesday is shocking. Men, women and children who posed no threat were killed as they slept in their home. While this incident is unusual in scale, it is, however, not the first time that an Israeli military operation in the occupied Palestinian territory has resulted in a high number of civilian casualties.

The Secretary-General has repeatedly expressed his deep concern about the rising death toll caused by the Israeli military operation in northern Gaza, given that such operations inevitably cause civilian casualties. The Secretary-General has reminded both sides of their obligations under international humanitarian law regarding the protection of civilians in armed conflict and reiterated his call to the Israeli Government to cease its military operations in Gaza without delay.

The Secretary-General took note of the reported announcement by the Israeli Government of a full investigation into this latest incident and looks forward to its early results. We see the investigation as an opportunity for Israel to reflect not only on the obvious military and operational implications, but also on the policy of military pressure as a whole, which is quite clearly not producing the desired goal of stopping rocket attacks. The Palestinians need, more than ever, a respite from the siege to which they are subjected so that they can see on the horizon a credible, negotiated way out.

The United Nations has repeatedly condemned Palestinian rocket fire. We do so again today, as we note that a large number of rockets have been fired by Palestinian militants into Israel during the past week. It is of critical importance that responsible Palestinian forces should join in action to make sure that militant attacks are stopped. This is one of the reasons why the United Nations and its partners in the Quartet continue to encourage the efforts of President Abbas to bring about a national unity Government. Such a new Government is the best way for the Palestinians to tackle the problem of law and order.

We hope that both Israelis and Palestinians will, in the wake of yesterday's tragedy in Beit Hanoun, pause and reflect on the fact that the conflict between them will not be resolved by force and that ways must be found to bring about negotiations. We therefore reiterate our call for a return to dialogue as the only way out of this spiral of violence.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the Permanent Observer of Palestine.

Mr. Mansour (Palestine): Mr. President, at the outset, allow me to congratulate you upon the assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for this month. We are certain that, under your able leadership, the Council will spare no effort to address the many critical issues before it at this time. We would also like to congratulate the Ambassador of Japan for his stewardship of the Council for the month of October. I would also like to thank Ms. Kane for her briefing.

Before proceeding with my statement, I would also like to thank the members of the Arab Group, the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) and others for their request to convene this timely meeting of the Security Council. The number of members in these groups represents the overwhelming majority of the countries of the United Nations who are counting on the Security Council to uphold its responsibilities, in accordance with the United Nations Charter.

Over the past week, Israel, the occupying Power, has continued and intensified its barbaric military aggression against the Palestinian people in the occupied Palestinian territory, especially in the Gaza Strip. Flagrant violations and grave breaches of international law — war crimes — are being committed by the occupying Power against the Palestinian civilian population every single day, including at this very moment. I believe it is necessary

to recall before the Council that wilful killing is causing great suffering and serious injury to body and health, and that the extensive destruction and appropriation of property, not justified by military necessity and carried out unlawfully and wantonly, are among those acts considered to constitute grave breaches of the Fourth Geneva Convention.

In this regard, in grave breach of the Convention, which governs military occupation, and in serious violation of other relevant provisions of international law, Israel continues to use excessive and indiscriminate force against Palestinian civilians, killing men, women and children, and wantonly destroying Palestinian homes and properties in the occupied Palestinian territory, particularly in the Gaza Strip. Defenceless and unprotected by the international community, the Palestinian people continue to suffer the wrath of Israel's violent and lethal occupation policies and practices.

Yesterday's massacre of innocent Palestinian civilians by the Israeli occupying forces in Beit Hanoun in the northern Gaza Strip is the most recent and the most telling illustration of the vicious and barbaric behaviour and actions of the occupying Power. As unprotected victims slept in their beds, Israeli tanks unleashed a barrage of tank fire, shelling the residential neighbourhood of Al-Kafaraneh. This massacre took the lives of 19 Palestinian civilians, including 16 members of one family — the Al-Athamneh family. Among the victims were a one-month-old infant, a one-year-old baby, seven children and six women. The survivors of the attack woke up to the gruesome scenes of blood and body parts scattered across their neighbourhood.

Until now, Palestinian medical personnel have been unable to identify several of the victims because the amount and non-conventional nature of the explosives used by the occupying Power have left most of the murdered with severe burns and shattered and distorted body parts. Doctors in the Gaza Strip insist that these kinds of severe injuries are caused by the most vicious types of weapons that Israel, the occupying Power, has been unleashing against the besieged Gaza population for the past six months.

This is terrorism. This is State terrorism. These are war crimes for which the perpetrators must be held accountable under international law. What we have seen today, and in recent days and months — the blood of Palestinian civilians flowing in the streets, the demolition of their homes, and their constant humiliation, suffering and collective punishment — is exactly what the Palestinian people have been subjected to under nearly 39 years of Israeli belligerence. There has been a constant barrage of war crimes, State terrorism and systematic human rights violations, for which the international community must hold this occupying Power responsible. The lawlessness and impunity of Israel must be brought to an end, and the Palestinian people must be accorded their rights under international law, including their right to protection as a civilian population under occupation.

The latest massacre in Beit Hanoun took place less than 24 hours after the Israeli occupying forces declared an end to their aggression in the area, which has been carried out since 1 November 2006. Families and lives are being destroyed by the occupying Power on a wholesale basis, as it continues launching military assaults.

In the past eight days alone, Israeli occupying forces have killed over 100 and have injured over 350 Palestinians. Since the end of June more than 450 Palestinians have been killed in the Gaza Strip, making death, mourning and grief a nearly daily ritual for the population of Gaza. Indeed, the bloodshed and loss caused by the occupying Power has been great, because Israel has breached every single one of its obligations as an occupying Power under international law. It has blatantly violated all norms and standards of international law, including international humanitarian law and human rights law.

To be frank, one of the most regrettable aspects of what is taking place in Gaza is the fact that Palestine has sent countless letters to all members of the Security Council, and the Council has done nothing. In those letters, we have described the dreadful situation under which the Palestinian people are forced to live as a result of the occupying Power's brutal actions. We have also warned that the absence of a clear and strong position by the international community to demand an immediate cessation of Israel's military aggression would result in further carnage among the Palestinian people.

That warning has also come from President Mahmoud Abbas who has repeatedly called on the Security Council and the international community to

shoulder its responsibilities and to stop Israel's brutal crimes. Despite that, the Security Council has failed to act, it has failed to uphold international peace and security and it has failed to protect the lives of hundreds of Palestinian civilians. The sanctioning of savage acts committed by the occupying Power creates a culture of impunity among the Israelis.

It should be highlighted that all of this has been occurring while President Mahmoud Abbas has been exerting all efforts to secure agreement among all Palestinian parties for national unity and to promote calm. President Abbas continues to call for diplomacy to be given a chance, in order to save many lives on the Palestinian side as well as on the Israeli side. However, the way Israel has reciprocated is by inflicting more suffering and loss among the Palestinian people and further destabilizing the situation in the occupied Palestinian territory and beyond, in the region as a whole, clearly making this a matter of international peace and security.

It must be said that we do not accept the repulsive repeated statements by Israeli officials expressing their "regret" or their "apology" for committing these atrocities against our people. Of course it regrets the loss of civilian lives, especially children. What civilized nation would not? Israel is always quick to respond with a forked tongue. However, in the same vein, its occupying forces continue to commit crime after crime with a culture of impunity. When a criminal is facing charges before a court, he often pleads before the judge, expressing his deepest regret. But in a real justice system, the judge will tell him, "Sorry is not enough, and you will have to be punished". That is why the perpetrators must be brought to justice.

As I said at the beginning of my statement, the wilful killing and injury of civilians constitutes a grave breach of international law — a war crime. Without a doubt, therefore, Israel is repeatedly committing war crimes against the Palestinian people. As such, the time has come for urgent action on the part of the Security Council. Failure to act at this time will seriously damage the Council's credibility. How many more Palestinians will have to be killed before the Security Council acts? How many Palestinian families will suffer complete annihilation by the occupying Power?

Enough is enough, and the Security Council cannot continue to remain silent and inactive when it comes to the lives of the Palestinian people. If the Security Council fails to uphold its obligations and to bring a halt to Israeli aggression, it will only bolster the occupying Power's impunity and that will only come at the cost of more innocent Palestinian lives. We trust that this is not the intention of the members of the Security Council.

Again, we call on the international community to voice its strong condemnation of the ongoing aggression and the massacre in Beit Hanoun. We are calling for the immediate cessation of this aggression and the immediate withdrawal of the occupying forces to the positions they held prior to 28 June 2006. Moreover, we call for an investigation of the massacre, as well as a mutual ceasefire, and for a United Nations observer force to monitor and observe the ceasefire.

The international community, in particular the Security Council, must hold the Israeli Government accountable before its legal and political obligations under international law; it must ensure that Israel abides by the principles of the Fourth Geneva Convention and brings its military aggression in the occupied Palestinian territory, in particular the Gaza Strip, to a complete halt. The Palestinian people — the Palestinian children — are awaiting the Council's response.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Israel.

Mr. Carmon (Israel): What brings us here today is the escalation of the situation in Gaza, following the ongoing terrorist attacks against Israel and my country's response in self-defence. In the course of the operation, a tragic event occurred, the accidental killing of civilians in Beit Hanoun. Despite the doubts we have heard just minutes ago from the PLO Observer on our public reaction to the event, I would like to assure you, Sir, and the members of the Council of the Israeli Government's and people's deep sorrow and regret over the deaths of innocent civilians. We are deeply saddened by that heartbreaking occurrence. Urgent humanitarian assistance and immediate medical care for the wounded has been offered to the Palestinian Authority, and an immediate investigation and halt of the artillery fire has also been ordered. Let me assure the Council that Israel is doing its utmost to make sure that such tragedies do not happen again.

Although the Palestinian civilians killed in this incident may have been killed by Israeli fire, they are in fact the victims of Hamas terrorism. In the course of

war — and let there be no mistake, the difficult times we are living in indeed constitute a time of war, a war against terror — there are regrettable incidents. But if Palestinian terror did not continue to assault Israelis, if Qassam rockets and mortar shells stopped sailing out of Gaza into Israel, the incident in Beit Hanoun would never have happened. A single decision is needed: the Palestinian Authority Government must decide to stop using terrorism as a means to achieve its goals.

When Israel left Gaza more than one year ago, we, together with the international community, waited to see how the Palestinians would take advantage of that historic occasion. Would they take charge of their destiny and seize the moment to improve their lives? Would they march towards the creation of an independent Palestinian State, living side by side, in peace and security, with Israel as their neighbour?

Unfortunately, reality has proved to be tragically different: Gaza has become a command centre for terror organizations; Gaza has become a launching pad for terrorist attacks; Gaza has become a cog in the terror machine of its puppeteering masters.

Since Israel left Gaza, more than 1,000 Qassam rockets and mortar shells have been fired at Israeli communities in the south — this, I repeat, since Israel left Gaza. The smuggling of weapons through tunnels dug deep in the ground also continues. Corporal Gilad Shalit remains abducted and in the hands of terrorists.

The Hamas Government is refusing to embrace the three principles outlined by the Quartet and adopted by the international community: to recognize Israel, to renounce violence and to abide by previous agreements.

But Hamas' insolence is worse than its disregard of obligations. Listen carefully to the words of the Palestinian Prime Minister, Ismail Haniyeh, who said:

> "The language of blood is my language, and there is nothing but blood. I have shut my mouth to the art of speech, and let the machine gun do the talking."

Or what about the Hamas Foreign Minister, Mahmoud Zahar, who said:

> "Neither the liberation of the Gaza Strip nor the liberation of the West Bank or even Jerusalem will suffice us. Hamas will pursue the armed struggle until the liberation of all our lands. We don't recognize the State of Israel and its right to hold on to one inch of Palestine."

Israel, too, has protested to the Security Council and its members for weeks now, alerting and warning them about the rising dangers in Gaza and the escalation in terrorist activity — all in vain.

Israel has been asked repeatedly to show restraint. We were told that we must give the moderates within the Palestinian leadership time and space to enable them to contain Hamas and other terrorist organizations. But let me ask the Council: what is enough time? When is it okay to say "No more"? After 1,000 rockets? After 2,000 rockets? When is enough enough?

If we have learned one thing since we disengaged from Gaza, it is that lengthy deliberations, public statements to the press and even resolutions cannot change the reality in Gaza today; only actions can. That begins, first and foremost, with renouncing terror and ending the violence against Israel.

The Palestinian leadership cannot demand national rights while refusing to fulfil its national responsibility. They cannot base their policy on hatred, and they cannot endorse terrorism. The Palestinian Authority must be held accountable for what happens in its territory and among its population.

Once again, it must be made clear to all: Israel does not target civilians. Israel's enemy is not the Palestinian people. Our enemy is the terrorists who attack our citizens. The equation is simple: if the terrorist attacks from Gaza stop, Israel will have no need for self-defence.

Hope, promise and an urgently needed change in reality can come only from those who understand the cost of terror and value the rewards of peace. It starts with a renewal of commitments to the two-State solution and an acceptance of the basic principle that each people's rights are to be realized in their own homeland.

The international community must reject the terrorist elements within the Palestinian Authority and the Palestinian leadership. At the same time, it cannot allow the moderates to hide behind the terrorists. It should call upon the moderate leadership to exercise its mandate and take control. It may be unpleasant, and even somewhat dangerous, to dismantle and outlaw terrorist groups. But that is what national leadership

means, and that is what national leaders do. If you want national rights, you must take responsibility: recognize Israel, renounce violence and abide by previous agreements.

Permitting the status quo to continue and allowing terrorism to go savagely unchecked are not merely acts of neglect; they constitute reckless endangerment of the prospects for peace, our regional future and the very foundations of human dignity and right to life.

In Lebanon, there is ample cause to be optimistic. Now, nearly three months after resolution 1701 (2006) was adopted by the Council, we have seen positive developments in southern Lebanon. Resolution 1701 (2006) sent a clear and unambiguous message that the international community will not tolerate a State within a State, be it Hizbollah or any other terrorist organization. The strength of that conviction and that resolution are a test for the Council. Trilateral meetings and basic coordination are beginning to get off the ground. We have witnessed the historic occurrence of the Lebanese army's deployment over all of its territory. Today, there is one, unequivocal address in Lebanon, and it is the Government of Lebanon.

Success, however, cannot be prematurely declared. Success will be determined only to the extent to which resolution 1701 (2006) is fully implemented. First and foremost is the immediate and unconditional release of our kidnapped soldiers, Udi Goldwasser and Eldad Regev. We have with us this morning, here in the Council Chamber, Mrs. Karnit Goldwasser, wife of Udi Goldwasser. She is here to remind Council members that, in voting for resolution 1701 (2006), they pledged to do their utmost to see our kidnapped soldiers released. This is a humanitarian crisis of the greatest urgency, and we ask the Council to make good on those pledges and to ensure their freedom.

Secondly, we must ensure the strength and effectiveness of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon and see to it that the Lebanese army continues and remains deployed throughout its territory.

Thirdly, there is reason to be concerned about the smuggling of arms across the border between Lebanon and Syria. Hizbollah's rearming not only violates the essence and strength of resolution 1701 (2006); it places the entire region in immediate peril. There can be no ambiguity in policy here. The embargo must be enforced, and its violators must be held accountable.

Those are matters of concern that we hope the Council will continue to monitor.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): In accordance with the understanding reached among Council members, I wish to remind all speakers to limit their statements to no more than five minutes in order to enable the Council to carry out its work expeditiously. Delegations with lengthy statements are kindly requested to circulate the texts in writing and to deliver a condensed version when speaking in the Chamber.

Mr. Al-Bader (Qatar) (*spoke in Arabic*): I am taking the floor in my capacity as Chairman of the Group of Arab States for the current month.

Permit me at the outset, on behalf of the Arab Group, to thank you, Mr. President, for convening this urgent Security Council meeting to consider the repeated Israeli aggressions in the Gaza Strip, in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem. The Arab Group requested this meeting following Israel's serious escalation of its military operations in the occupied Palestinian territory at the beginning of this month.

The latest Israeli aggression has led to the deaths of more than 50 civilians and the injury of hundreds in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank in one week. It has destroyed vital infrastructure, in grave violation of international humanitarian law and international human rights. In particular, it represents a grave violation of the relevant provisions of the 1949 Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilians in Time of War. It also contravenes relevant Security Council resolutions.

The consequences of Israel's military operations affect many areas of the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. Gaza has become a vast prison in which the people have been shorn of their basic needs and their freedom of movement, leading to a further deterioration of their living conditions.

The excessive and unbalanced use of armed force and other illegal practices of the occupation forces, along with the targeting of civilian women during a peaceful demonstration in Beit Hanoun, are proof that the military campaign has exceeded its declared objective. It falls within the context of policies of killing, suppression, intimidation and collective punishment implemented by Israel, the occupying Power, against the Palestinian people. In seeking to

06-60930

defend its civilians, Israel has no reason to resort to such illegal and excessive practices or to act in violation of humanitarian law, thereby hindering the peace process.

It is truly confounding that the international community should remain silent in the face of the occupying Power's blatant and disproportionate aggression against defenceless Palestinians. That silence can only encourage Israel to commit further offences against the Palestinian people, culminating in the grave crime committed yesterday against civilians in the sight of the entire world, in which artillery shells were fired on a residential neighbourhood, killing nearly 20 people and injuring more than 40, most of them women and children, in continuation of the violations repeatedly committed by the occupying Power in the occupied territories, which have killed more than 100 Palestinian children since the beginning of the year.

Israel's ongoing flagrant violations of and disregard for international law and the resolutions of the General Assembly and the Security Council erode the credibility of the Organization and instil frustration and a sense of hopelessness that do not serve the purposes of peace and stability in the Middle East. The Council must therefore assume its responsibilities for the maintenance of international peace and security and urgently stem the violence in the occupied territories. We also call on the Secretary-General to prepare a report, to be submitted to the Security Council, on Israel's ongoing aggression in the occupied Palestinian territories. We further call for an immediate ceasefire in the occupied territories and the dispatch of an international observer force. Moreover, we ask the Security Council to take definitive and concrete action to revive the stagnant Middle East peace process on all tracks, in accordance with the agreements reached to date and in the light of the relevant Security Council resolutions, the Arab peace initiative, the road map and other terms of reference. We also call for full guarantees and incentives for all parties to implement those agreements and for the removal of all obstacles to efforts to reach a lasting and comprehensive peace. Finally, we would ask the Council to give serious consideration to the draft resolution we have submitted in that regard.

I now wish to speak in my national capacity and to make a statement on behalf of the delegation of Qatar.

At a time when the Palestinian people are suffering a grave deterioration in their humanitarian situation resulting from the blockade imposed upon them by the Israeli occupation authorities, which have failed to observe the most basic human rights, the Israeli Government has escalated its military operations in the Palestinian territories since the beginning of this month, particularly in the Gaza Strip, and in a manner that exceeds all expectations.

It has transformed the Gaza Strip into a virtual battlefield and exposed its defenceless inhabitants, including women, children and the elderly, to grave danger, culminating yesterday in a massacre of innocent civilians. Nearly 21 people were killed and more than 55 injured, most of them women, children and the elderly, in Beit Hanoun, in violation of international law and norms, including international humanitarian law and the Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilians in Time of War.

The Council must address this acute crisis and assume its responsibilities for the maintenance of international peace and security and the protection of civilians from murder, devastation and the violation of their human rights. It is incumbent upon the Council to accord this question the attention it merits in comparison with others. We would never have imagined that the Council would stand idly by before such a serious escalation without lifting a finger to put an end to the violence and promote the peace process. It is paradoxical that the Council should address less pressing questions with greater attention, while ignoring a critical question that may have grave international and regional repercussions and implications.

The last century witnessed the outbreak of numerous conflicts that the Council addressed in all earnestness. However, in the Middle East, the volcano of conflict has erupted and has yet to subside. Today, the crisis in our region has been exacerbated more than ever before and, while the blood of innocents continues to be shed unabated, the temperature of the peace process rises and falls with the political climate prevailing in certain capitals. The pace of that peace process has ranged between stalling and a complete standstill, thus eroding popular confidence in the process, which, in turn has led to widespread frustration and despair. We must therefore pause and reflect deeply on the reasons behind the current failure

and stagnation of the peace process, which perpetuate the spiral of violence and counter-violence.

All acts of violence, provocation, instigation and destruction warrant condemnation, no matter who perpetrates them. The shedding of people's blood, be they Arab, Israeli or other, is taboo. In such tragic conditions, there is a manifest need to accelerate the resumption of efforts to find a peaceful, comprehensive and lasting settlement to the crisis in the Middle East and, at its core, the question of Palestine, in accordance with international terms of reference, relevant Security Council resolutions and the road map. At the same time, we must understand that it is impossible to fight an idea with a bomb. Experience has proven that armies and separation walls are no longer sufficient to provide security for the citizens of our age, especially in a region like the Middle East. We must, therefore, seek effective means to achieve security, while recognizing that the Middle East crisis cannot be resolved by force, but rather through dialogue and common sense.

In conclusion, I would like to raise the following question before the Security Council. Why does the Council address questions of lesser importance and seriousness with great earnestness and resolve while this grave question — the Arab-Israeli conflict, which endangers the security of the entire region — does not enjoy such attention, in particular when the Middle East region as a whole is experiencing grave and critical conditions that are known to everyone? I look forward to receiving an answer to that question.

If there is an attempt to usurp the will of a people, we do not accept that as the will of the Council. We will work towards the adoption of the draft resolution that we have circulated to members of the Council as soon as possible. We look forward to the Council taking a united and sincere approach to this serious issue.

Nana Effah-Apenteng (Ghana): At the outset, allow me to thank you, Mr. President, for organizing this meeting, and to express my appreciation to Assistant Secretary-General Angela Kane for her briefing on the latest developments in the occupied Palestinian territory.

The week-long Israeli military operation in the occupied Palestinian territory — ostensibly to stop the firing of rockets into Israel — has, like other similar incursions, resulted in casualties among the Palestinian population. In the latest attack, carried out on Wednesday, 8 November, 18 Palestinians, including 8 children and 7 women, were reported killed, with as many as 40 persons wounded in Beit Hanoun, in the northern Gaza Strip. We condemn that attack and express our profound shock at the loss of life and damage to property. We extend our heartfelt sympathies and condolences to President Abbas, the Palestinian Authority and the bereaved families of the victims.

The disastrous outcome of that latest military operation, and others in the past, has shown that it is impossible to conduct such attacks in a populated area like Gaza without causing death and injury to innocent civilians and collateral damage to property. We have taken note of the regret expressed by the Israeli Government over the incident and look forward to the early release of the findings of the investigations promised by the Israeli Government into this tragedy.

Attacks of this nature have in the past led to reprisals that have caused more havoc and fuelled the conflict between Palestine and Israel, without an end to the provocative cycle of violence that persists in the region. We would, therefore, like to take this opportunity to appeal to the Palestinian people to exercise maximum restraint and to avoid any revenge attacks against Israel.

It should now be apparent to both Palestine and Israel that the firing of rockets and the execution of military operations have not achieved the desired objective of preventing further attacks into one another's territory. Those actions have further escalated hostilities and worsened the plight of their people. In that regard, my delegation wishes to remind both sides of their obligations under international humanitarian law regarding the protection of civilians in armed conflict.

Given the highly charged atmosphere in the Middle East, the Security Council must act with dispatch and request the cessation of Israeli military operations in the occupied Palestinian territory. In that respect, we also expect the Council to call on Palestinians to halt the firing of rockets against Israeli targets, which invariably attracts military strikes.

We share the view that violence is not a solution to the conflict in the Middle East, at the heart of which is the Palestinian question. Effective action by the Security Council to achieve the immediate cessation of

hostilities will be an important step in the search for a solution to this problem. We do not believe that the international community has devoted enough attention of late to this long-festering conflict. The Security Council must henceforth resolve to work assiduously towards the resolution of the Palestinian question on the basis of its own resolutions and in accordance with the Road Map and the Arab peace initiative and to implement the two-State solution that entails an independent Palestinian State living side by side with Israel within internationally recognized borders.

Mr. De La Sablière (France) (*spoke in French*): I would like to thank Ms. Angela Kane for her briefing. I also wish to associate myself with the statement to be delivered shortly by the representative of Finland on behalf of the European Union.

I would first like to express my country's sorrow at the news of the terrible events of recent days that have taken the lives of so many Palestinians in the Gaza Strip, especially yesterday's occurrence at Beit Hanoun. On behalf of the Government of France, I wish to extend our heartfelt condolences to the families of the Palestinian victims. France would like to see light shed on the circumstances surrounding that attack as possible. It will be up to the Secretary-General to set out the parameters for an eventual independent inquiry. We join the Secretary-General in calling on Israel to immediately put an end to its military operations in the Gaza Strip.

More generally speaking, France would like to reiterate its condemnation of indiscriminate Israeli artillery fire into populated areas. Those actions, which endanger civilian populations and constitute a violation of international humanitarian law, especially the Geneva Conventions, must end. Israel's legitimate right to self-defence on behalf of its citizens must be exercised in full respect for international humanitarian law.

France also condemns the firing of rockets into Israeli territory, as well as the appeal of certain armed Palestinian groups for a resumption of suicide attacks. The Palestinian Authority has the duty to maintain law and order and combat terrorism. We would like to reiterate our support for the efforts of President Abbas to strengthen national Palestinian consensus and to form a Government whose political platform would reflect the principles of the Quartet and of the peace process.

As the Minister for Foreign Affairs said here in September, there is no military solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict. Violence only feeds frustration, resentment and hatred. It also runs the risk of dragging the entire region into a new dangerous escalation. Today more than ever, the two parties must demonstrate a spirit of responsibility and abstain from any action that could further complicate efforts to arrive at a political solution at a time when peace and dialogue should be everyone's objective.

The international community — and the Quartet first and foremost — must become involved without delay in resolving this conflict, which remains central to the region. The tragic escalation of recent days underscores the need for an urgent meeting of the Quartet to follow up the commitments undertaken in New York in September, with a view to reinvigorating the prospects for peace. There is no alternative to the establishment of a viable, democratic and sovereign Palestinian State living in peace and security with Israel.

Given the worrisome growing number of civilian victims in recent months, we wonder about the possibility of possibly putting in place a mechanism to protect the civilian population. We believe that, in collaboration with the Secretary-General, we should collectively consider potential options in that regard. The next meeting of the Quartet may provide an opportunity for that. France, along with its European Union partners, will continue to work towards a comprehensive, just and lasting solution based on Security Council resolutions, the Madrid Conference terms of reference, the principle of land for peace and the Arab peace initiative.

Mr. Matulay (Slovakia): At the outset, I would like to join previous speakers in thanking Assistant Secretary-General Ms. Angela Kane for her briefing and update on the current situation in Gaza, and you, Mr. President, for organizing and chairing this meeting to discuss, in a constructive manner, recent developments in the region.

Slovakia aligns itself with the statement that will be delivered shortly by the Permanent Representative of Finland on behalf of the European Union. I will therefore limit my statement to the following remarks.

Slovakia is deeply concerned at the increased violence that has recently been taking place in Gaza and especially at yesterday's shocking Israeli military

operation which resulted in the death and injury of dozens of Palestinian civilians. We strongly deplore any action that causes such appalling civilian casualties and call on Israel to undertake serious efforts to investigate that tragic event. Concrete results are urgently needed.

Although we believe Israel has the right of self-defence against terrorism and its perpetrators, its response must always be proportionate, and everything possible must be done to avert the loss of innocent lives. In that regard, we call on Israel to take every possible measure to protect the lives of the civilian population, in keeping with international humanitarian law.

We also urge the Palestinian Authority to undertake all necessary measures and make every effort to find and release the kidnapped Israeli soldier, as well as prevent further military and terrorist attacks on Israel, notably the launching of rockets against Israeli population centres. We support the leadership and efforts of President Mahmoud Abbas to achieve that goal and to foster national unity among the Palestinians. We hope that the Palestinian Government will cooperate towards that end.

We also note and support the many efforts made by President Abbas to form a Government of national unity. We expect that such a Government will be committed to the Quartet principles and that its political platform will enable early engagement as well as the continuation of dialogue aimed at finding a solution to the Middle East conflict.

We take this opportunity to reaffirm our support for a just, comprehensive and lasting settlement to the Middle East conflict based on all relevant Security Council resolutions and negotiations between the two sides. Slovakia fully supports the two-State solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In order to make progress in implementing the vision of two democratic States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security, both parties have to accept previous agreements and obligations, return to constructive dialogue and take concrete actions aimed at building and strengthening mutual confidence and trust.

We are convinced that the Quartet represents the most appropriate mechanism for advancing the peace process and that the road map, possibly in an updated form reflecting recent developments on the ground, is the most efficient plan for achieving a lasting peace settlement to the conflict.

In conclusion, I would like to stress once again that there is no military solution to the Israeli-Palestinian dispute. The only way to achieve a comprehensive and lasting settlement to the conflict is through peaceful negotiations.

The international community, including the Security Council, must remain actively engaged in the peace process in the Middle East. Both parties to the conflict, however, must do more and demonstrate clear political will and a commitment to ending this protracted conflict, which has threatened global peace and security for more than half a century.

I would therefore reiterate our commonly shared belief that there is a need to reinvigorate the peace process. In spite of the latest wave of violence and hostilities, we continue to believe that there a window of opportunity still exists for the Israelis and the Palestinians to put the peace process on the right track. That window of opportunity must be taken advantage of through concrete and immediate action leading from mutual recognition of the right to exist to the mutual peaceful coexistence of two viable States.

Mrs. Taj (United Republic of Tanzania): Mr. President, I wish to thank you for having organized this meeting. We join others in thanking Ms. Angela Kane for her briefing, and we thank the Palestinian observer and the Israeli representative for their statements.

Tanzania has been following with deep concern the disastrous course of events between Israel and its neighbours, and in particular the grave situation in northern Gaza caused by the recent major Israeli military operation. We condemn the encirclement of the town of Beit Hanoun, which resulted in many civilian casualties, including innocent women and children, which constitutes a grave violation of international humanitarian law.

The killing yesterday morning of 19 civilians in Gaza is profoundly shocking. We offer our condolences to the families of the victims. Israel should not use the pretext of self-defence in targeting innocent civilians. The killing of civilians, including children and women, is unjustifiable and intolerable. It is evident that Israeli military policies in the Palestinian territories have gone too far and must not be allowed to continue. The

international community and the Security Council must respond.

Once again, we urge Israel to cease its aggression against the Palestinians, withdraw its forces from Gaza and exercise utmost restraint, including taking every step possible to protect civilians. We have noted the Israeli Government's regret and its decision to conduct an investigation, and we look forward to its early conclusion and to appropriate action. We also support the call for an independent investigation.

Tanzania again calls on the Palestinian militants to cease firing rockets against Israeli civilian targets.

The current spate of violence comes at a time when there were hopes that an agreement would be reached on the formation of a Palestinian Government that could end the current stalemate and build a climate of trust in which the political process could be rekindled. The people of Gaza have not enjoyed peace in a long time, but their situation has worsened following the Israeli military assaults and the current economic paralysis.

We reiterate our call for concerted and deliberate efforts to ensure that there is no further destruction of Palestinian infrastructure and property and that emergency humanitarian assistance is provided as a matter of urgency.

Both Israel and Palestine must realize that the endless violence is complicating the quest for a lasting peace in the area. They should give dialogue a chance. We also urge President Abbas and the Hamas leadership to resume their talks on the formation of a Government of national unity.

We call on the international community, including the Quartet, to continue to assist the parties to return to a negotiated two-State solution, on the basis of land for peace, to end the conflict, as provided for in numerous United Nations resolutions and in the road map.

In conclusion, we thank the delegation of Qatar for the draft resolution it has circulated, which we are ready to discuss with a view to its early adoption.

Mr. Bolton (United States of America): Despite all of the emotion in the air, we must have an honest and even-handed discussion of recent events in Gaza.

In Gaza and adjacent areas of Israel, the Hamas-led Palestinian Authority Government has continued to play a role in perpetuating instability and violence. There is no question that Israel has a right to defend itself and the lives of its citizens.

On 7 November, Israeli forces withdrew from much of Gaza, and almost immediately Palestinian terrorists resumed firing rockets into Israel targeted at civilians.

We deeply regret the injuries and loss of life in Gaza on November 8 in and around Beit Hanoun. We have seen the Israeli Government's apology and understand that an investigation has begun. We hope that it will be completed quickly and that appropriate steps will be taken to avoid a repetition of this tragic incident. We call on all parties to act with restraint in order to avoid causing any harm to innocent civilians.

We also call again for the immediate and unconditional release of Corporal Shalit as well as that of the two Israel Defense Forces (IDF) soldiers — Eldad Regev and Ehud Goldwasser — kidnapped on 12 July by Hizbollah during its terrorist attacks across the Blue Line.

It is the responsibility of the Hamas-led Palestinian Authority Government to prevent terror and take the necessary steps to stop attacks from within Gaza. Progress towards peace needs a Palestinian Government that disavows terror and violence. We call on Hamas to accept the Quartet principles: renunciation of terror, recognition of Israel and acceptance of previous agreements.

Statements by the Hamas leadership that the truce with Israel is over and that armed struggle can resume are alarming, and calls by the military wing of Hamas to Muslims worldwide to strike American targets and interests should be condemned by the international community.

More terror, whether directed at Israel, the United States or the European Union Office in Gaza City, is not the solution. Nor will it enable the Palestinian people to achieve their aspirations. In fact, the opposite is the case.

It is the responsibility of the Hamas-led Palestinian Authority Government to prevent terror and take the necessary steps to stop attacks and dismantle the terrorist infrastructure.

The Road Map and the principles contained therein remain the only agreed international basis upon which to move forward towards the two-State goal.

The Quartet has welcomed efforts by Palestinian Authority President Abbas to form a Government explicitly committed to Quartet principles, and the United States stands ready to renew engagement and assistance to a Palestinian Authority committed to peace and the Quartet principles.

We support diplomatic efforts to engage responsible leaders, help the Palestinians strengthen and reform their security sector and assist Israel and Palestinian leaders in their efforts to come together to resolve their differences.

The United States is acutely aware of the economic and humanitarian needs of the Palestinian people. We continue to work with the Israeli Government and Palestinian Authority President Abbas to help meet critical humanitarian needs in the West Bank and Gaza, where humanitarian conditions have deteriorated as a result of the Hamas-led Palestinian Authority Government's refusal to govern responsibly.

Progress requires a commitment to peace from both sides of the conflict. Since assuming control of the Palestinian Authority Government last winter, Hamas has failed utterly in this regard. We urge the Palestinian Authority Government to renounce terror, accept the Quartet principles and become a legitimate partner for peace.

Mr. Gayama (Congo) (*spoke in French*): My delegation would like to thank you, Mr. President, for having organized this debate on the situation in the Middle East — a situation that has seriously deteriorated in recent days, as has been rightly pointed out by the countries and organizations that formally requested the holding of this meeting, in particular the League of Arab States, the Non-Aligned Movement, the Organization of the Islamic Conference and the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People. My delegation also endorses the statement to be made later by Cuba on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

The deaths of 18 people, including seven women and eight children, on 8 November as a result of an Israeli military operation in Beit Hanoun, and the destruction of vital infrastructure and property in the Gaza Strip, constitute an intolerable escalation of the situation.

Strangely enough, those extremely serious events occurred after Israel announced that it would withdraw its forces from Beit Hanoun, where the most recent excessive — as we see it — disproportionate and indiscriminate Israeli military operations took place, in response to the firing of rockets into Israel by Palestinian militias.

My delegation firmly condemns such military actions, which have led to considerable loss of life among civilians, particularly women and children. We call for an independent inquiry to determine who was responsible for those heinous acts.

Of course, we recognize once again that Israel has a right to defend itself and to protect its people from attack, but that right does not free it from its obligations and responsibilities under international humanitarian law, in particular the 1949 Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War. We call upon Israel to show the greatest restraint in carrying out military actions in densely populated areas.

My delegation is particularly concerned, because such actions clearly erode efforts aimed at establishing confidence-building measures between the two parties to the conflict. It also notes that these developments are taking place at a time when efforts are under way to give the Palestinian Authority a national unity Government made up of professionals — a Government that could meet the requirements tied to the recognition of Israel's right to exist, the renunciation of violence and the acceptance of agreements previously entered into, in particular the Road Map.

My delegation also notes that these dangerous developments, which we regret, are taking place while efforts are under way to secure the release of Corporal Gilad Shalit, who is being held by Palestinian militias.

We hardly need recall that military actions in the Middle East are always counterproductive. We therefore steadfastly reaffirm that only negotiations between the two parties, on the basis of existing mechanisms, including the Arab Peace Initiative and relevant United Nations resolutions, will lead to the achievement of the goal of two States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security.

Mr. Vassilakis (Greece): Greece fully associates itself with the statement to be delivered later by the representative of Finland on behalf of the European Union. My statement will therefore be brief.

Recent tragic events in the occupied Palestinian territories made today's meeting of the Security Council imperative. Over the past few months, we have witnessed an alarming deterioration in the situation in Gaza and the West Bank. The abhorrent events in Beit Hanoun are the latest in a vicious circle of spiralling violence, which has — as is unfortunately too often the case in these circumstances — cost the lives of many innocent civilians, including women and children.

While recognizing Israel's duty to protect its citizens, we nevertheless wish to underline that its actions in this regard must not be disproportionate or contrary to international law, including international humanitarian law and international human rights law. We are all observing the gradual return of the Middle East to a time that we had all hoped had been left behind; we had hoped that the progress that had been made was irreversible. By all accounts, it appears that this is, unfortunately, not the case.

Lasting peace in the Middle East seems to be based on the most delicate and fragile of premises, namely, the behaviour of the parties themselves. The respective responsibilities of the parties are clear; so, too, are the respective responsibilities of the international community. It is up to all of us to find an appropriate and effective way to fulfil those responsibilities.

I wish to reiterate the comments of my Foreign Minister when she addressed the Council in September: we should spare no effort, we should leave no option unexplored and we should exhaust all possibilities in pursuing and, ultimately, in achieving, a just, comprehensive and lasting peace in the Middle East. Tragedies such as the one in Beit Hanoun make this responsibility painfully apparent. We must urgently seek to examine in depth what options are available to us, what steps we must take in order to put the peace process back on track so that those in the region who genuinely aspire to peace are given a tangible, practical and, not least, credible advantage over those who seek to obstruct all prospects for peace.

Ms. Løj (Denmark): Denmark aligns itself with the statement to be delivered by Finland on behalf of the European Union.

Yet again, we are called to this Chamber by the tragic loss of civilian life in Gaza. Yet again, we are called upon to consider how we can restore hope to the people of the Middle East and how we can overcome their increasing sense of desperation. And yet again, the outlook seems increasingly discouraging.

Denmark was shocked at yesterday's news that 19 Palestinian civilians — 11 of them children — were killed when Israeli artillery hit a housing block in Beit Hanoun. I offer the deepest condolences of the Danish Government and people to the victims' families and to President Abbas.

We welcome Israel's official recognition that the attack was a tragic mistake and its pledge for a full investigation. We urge Israeli authorities to complete the inquiry promptly and to make the results public.

Yesterday's tragedy was the culmination of days of intense military action in Gaza, causing the loss of many civilian lives and great damage to houses and civilian infrastructure. Denmark is deeply concerned about the continued escalation of violence and deplores the fact that Israeli military operations have taken a heavy toll in civilian lives.

The right of a State to defend itself against terrorist threats does not justify disproportionate or indiscriminate action or use of force. Disproportionate use of force is contrary to international humanitarian law and tends to undermine the very political purpose it is supposed to serve by fuelling further hatred and conflict.

The solution is not more violence. All sides must cease the use of force for political purposes. That requires an immediate halt to attacks on Israel. The continued rocket attacks from the Palestinian territory into Israel are unacceptable and must be condemned. The Palestinian Government must take action to ensure that such attacks are stopped. At the same time, Israel must ensure that its short-term measures designed to improve the security of Israeli civilians conform to the requirements of international law and do not hamper the achievement of a lasting solution to the conflict.

But to pave the way for progress, the kidnapped Israeli soldier must be released immediately. Likewise, the Palestinian ministers and legislators in Israeli custody must be freed promptly. Regional players should do everything they can to support efforts that can lead to the resumption of the peace process.

The challenge is to support and strengthen those forces which are committed to a political solution. That is the only way out of the current stalemate of violence. We must keep alive the vision of two

independent States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace within recognized borders. Indeed, this vision is a core principle of the Road Map. Certainly, the violence that brings us here today is leading us in a wrong and worrisome direction.

Increasingly, the collapse of the Palestinian Authority and chaos in the territory both seem imminent. It is a social, economic as well as political collapse that is about to become a grim reality. Clashes among Palestinian factions only aggravate the human suffering and desperation. They run counter to the interest of the Palestinian people.

Thus, we support President Abbas' attempt to build national unity and establish a credible Palestinian Government with a platform that reflects the principles laid down by the Quartet. A functioning Palestinian Government is essential for governing the Palestinian territories and as a viable partner for the international community in its efforts to alleviate the dire humanitarian situation in Palestine, breathe life into the Palestinian economy, and relaunch the peace process. The international community stands ready to support such a Government.

Israel has a crucial role to play in improving Palestinian economic prospects. The tax and customs revenues now being withheld should be released immediately. These revenues can be channelled through the temporary international mechanism, which has proven itself valuable in channelling aid directly to the Palestinian people. Moreover, the Agreement on Movement and Access must be implemented fully and immediately.

In conclusion, I would re-emphasize that all parties must participate if the peace process is to succeed. Neighbours, including Syria, must play constructive roles and the international community, led by the Quartet, must be willing and able to provide whatever incentives are needed to set the healing process in motion.

Ms. Pierce (United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland): It is clear that the Council is gravely concerned by the deaths of Palestinian civilians in the strike on Beit Hanoun. It is absolutely right that the Council should meet on this issue, and we thank Qatar and you, Sir, for convening this meeting.

On a personal level, nobody could remain unmoved by the suffering of families that the Palestinian representative movingly described. They are not in this Chamber, but I ask him to convey our condolences to the families of those killed and to the injured.

Like others, we have difficulty understanding what the action was meant to achieve and how it can be justified. It is particularly worrying that it happened after the military operation was declared over. We have raised our concerns with the Government of Israel. Israel must respect its obligation to avoid harming civilians. We remain gravely concerned over the mounting casualties and the civilian suffering in the whole Gaza Strip. We recognize Israel's legitimate right to self-defence, but urge it to exercise the utmost restraint. We underline the importance that any action taken by Israel must be proportionate and in accordance with international humanitarian law.

We welcome the news that the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) has launched an investigation into Beit Hanoun. We heard the Israeli representative's description of this tragic accident. We look to Israel to pursue vigourously the reasons for the attack and to offer confidence that measures are in place to ensure that such an event cannot recur, however difficult those measures might be. If it transpires that there has been culpability, we look to individuals to be prosecuted in accordance with the law.

We continue to call for Palestinian militants to cease their rocket attacks on Israeli civilian targets. Israeli families, too, have the right not to be targeted. We call for the release of Corporal Shalit.

In her briefing, the Assistant Secretary-General referred to the call from the Hamas leader in Syria. Such language is not acceptable and we hope that Syria can use its influence constructively to advance the cause of peace.

There is no justification and no political cause that justifies terrorism and attacks against innocent civilians. So much effort is put into death and little by comparison into peace. Did those who fired the rockets on Israel want to disrupt President Abbas' efforts to bring about national unity?

We support President Abbas in this endeavour. If based on the Quartet requirements, it offers the possibility of re-engagement by the international community and the United Kingdom would look forward to being able to work with such a Government.

As the Assistant Secretary-General and others said, this whole incident underlines the necessity of finding a political solution to the current situation in Israel and the occupied territories. We continue to believe that the Road Map offers the best chance for a lasting peace. I note the call around the Chamber today for early meetings of the Quartet, and we would be very happy to consider that idea.

The situation in Lebanon was also raised. Again, there has been too much suffering on both sides. I can assure Mrs. Goldwasser and the Council that we are committed to the full implementation of resolution 1701 (2006), including the release of the Israeli soldiers. We commend the Secretary-General's efforts to implement that resolution in full.

I return to the point of the Quartet and the Road Map. We are not asking for Hamas to make concessions on final status issues, but rather to accept that for negotiations to happen and be meaningful, there must be a common basis from which they start: namely that the goal is a two-State solution achieved through talks between two parties which mutually acknowledge each other. We hope every effort can be exerted now to finding that comprehensive settlement.

Mr. Churkin (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): The Russian Federation is deeply concerned over the latest dangerous developments in the Gaza Strip. The situation in this region, in Palestinian-Israeli relations and in the Middle East region in general is an extremely difficult one. It calls for urgent actions to prevent further destabilization; both sides need to exercise restraint and display wisdom. It also calls for recognition of the dangerous point to which they have come.

The operations of the armed forces of Israel in the Gaza Strip have already claimed considerable civilian lives and have greatly worsened the prospects for reaching an Israeli-Palestinian settlement. Moscow is extremely concerned over the tragic incident in Beit Hanoun on 8 November 2006. We express our condolences to the bereaved families and loved ones. The actions of the Israeli army go beyond the framework of the declared goal to preventing the shelling of Israel from the Gaza Strip. Such a disproportionate and indiscriminate use of force is unacceptable.

Unfortunately, the current escalation of violence is taking place specifically at a point in time when the political forces of the Palestinian National Authority are trying to create a coalition Government that would be capable of addressing the pressing problems of Palestinians and establishing constructive cooperation with Israel. According to the latest reports, the talks between the Palestinian factions Fatah and Hamas to form a Government have been suspended. We expect that, despite the challenging situation in the Palestinian Authority territory, this process will be resumed in a constructive spirit in the near term.

The Russian side again calls upon the leadership of the Palestinian Authority to take robust measures to reign in extremists, to put an end to terrorist attacks, to halt the firing of Qassam rockets into Israel, which are provoking the Israeli Government's response, and to release the abducted Israel soldier, Gilad Sharit. We support mediation efforts to that end.

All Palestinian political factions and groups need to finally recognize that provocations aimed at exacerbating tensions are detrimental to attaining the national aspirations of the people of Palestine.

Major responsibilities for preventing further destabilization of the situation in the Palestinian territories and in the entire region lie with the Government of Israel. Its right and obligation to protect the life and security of its citizens is not in doubt. However, these goals will not be achieved at the price of severely impacting the Palestinian civilians, massively punishing totally innocent residents of Gaza.

We see only one solution to the current situation. Both sides need to put an end to violence, undertake urgent steps to stabilize the situation and resume the political dialogue. Joint efforts are needed to clear the way for this kind of dialogue and not create further impediments to advance it. There is no alternative to this approach.

The Russian delegation is of the view that, at the official meeting of the Security Council on 21 November, it will have an opportunity to express its views on other aspects of a comprehensive settlement in the Middle East.

Mr. Liu Zhenmin (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): The Chinese delegation is grateful to Assistant Secretary-General Angela Kane for her briefing.

The recent firing by Israeli tanks on the Gaza Strip has resulted in numerous civilian casualties, including many women and children. China is deeply

concerned and disturbed by this. We would like to take this opportunity to express our sincere condolences and sympathies to the bereaved families of the victims. We hope that Israel will carry out an earnest and serious investigation of the incident, and publish their findings at an early date to accord justice to the victims.

China continues to believe that the Palestinian-Israeli dispute should be resolved through peaceful negotiations. We are against any practices that may exacerbate tensions in the region, or any military actions that may harm innocent civilians. The excessive use of force by the Israeli army can only lead to the worsening of Israeli-Palestinian relations. On the other hand, rocket launches by the Palestinians into Israeli territory are also unwise. We hope that both Israel and Palestine will exercise maximum restraint, resort to reason and put an end to the vicious cycle of violence, thus avoiding the further deterioration of the situation.

Recently, the major parties in Palestine — Fatah of the Palestine Liberation Organization and the Islamic Resistance Movement, Hamas — have been discussing the formation of a Government of national unity, as well as an improvement of Palestinian-Israeli relations, which is an encouraging sign. However, this hope is again dashed as a result of the escalation of violence.

We call upon both Israel and Palestine, in the long-term interests of both countries, to stop the bloody conflict and create an environment conducive to the restoration of political negotiations. The Middle East problem has lasted for over half a century. It not only has brought great suffering to the countries in the region, but also has repercussions for world peace and development.

Since the beginning of the year, the situation in the occupied Palestinian territories has continued to worsen. The conflict between Palestine and Israel has continued to escalate and the Middle East peace process has been deeply mired in stagnation. China has always believed that a comprehensive and just solution to the Middle East question should be worked out on the basis of the relevant United Nations resolutions and the principle of land for peace through political negotiations.

Political realities over the years demonstrate that a State of Palestine, in peaceful coexistence with Israel, is in the fundamental interests of both Palestine and Israel and the peoples in the Middle East. This will also contribute to the early realization of peace and stability in the region. We hope that the day will soon come when Palestine and Israel will demonstrate political will and take a courageous step forward.

China will, as always, join forces with advocates of peace and continue to play a constructive role for the realization of Middle East peace.

Mr. Mayoral (Argentina) (*spoke in Spanish*): Argentina is also gravely concerned about the recent events in the Gaza Strip and, in particular, about the rising death toll of innocent civilians as a result of the Israeli military operations.

My country unequivocally and energetically condemns the military operation carried out in the residential area of Beit Hanoun on the morning of 8 November, which has resulted in the deaths of at least 18 Palestinian civilians, including eight children and seven women. We extend our sincere condolences to the bereaved families.

We believe that this type of Israeli military action in populated areas must cease immediately from now on. Too many so-called mistakes are occurring.

As we have stated in previous occasions, Israel has the right to defend itself, but in the exercise of this right it should fully abide by the provisions of humanitarian international law regarding the protection of the civilian population, in particular the Fourth Geneva Convention.

In view of the serious nature of the recent events in Beit Hanoun, we believe that an independent and impartial investigation should be carried out urgently, and that its results should be made available to this Security Council and to the wider international community.

In these difficult circumstances, it is necessary that the parties exercise the utmost restraint and avoid taking any measures that could lead to an increase of violence. In the short term, we believe that it is imperative that the Qassem rocket attacks from the Gaza Strip against Israeli targets must cease immediately and that the Palestinian Authority should take the necessary measures to prevent new suicide bombings or any other attacks against Israeli civilians from happening. Recent statements by some leaders of Hamas in this regard are quite worrying, to say the least.

As we said before, Israel must cease all military activities in the Gaza Strip and withdraw from that territory. Likewise, — we repeat — Israel should cease military operations in the West Bank and put an end to unilateral measures that create facts on the ground, such as settlement activities and the construction of the separation wall.

We acknowledge that what happened in Beit Hanoun may have a profound impact on the Palestinian territories. Nevertheless, we hope that the conversations between President Abbas and Prime Minister Haniyeh on the formation of a Government of national unity will continue. The platform of such a Government must reflect the three principles set out by the Quartet. We hope that, in spite of statements to the contrary, the leadership of Hamas will respond positively to the proposals made by the Palestinian President and continue to engage in a meaningful dialogue to resolve all of the outstanding issues.

We consider that the release of Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit also continues to be of the utmost priority. We appreciate and recognize the efforts of the Egyptian Government in this regard, and we hope they will bear fruit. Members of the Legislative Council and the Palestinian Government who are being held as prisoners by Israel should also be released.

The humanitarian situation in Gaza continues to be a reason of concern for my Government and for my country. We reiterate that the crossings into and out of Gaza should be kept open and that both parties should take measures to implement the Agreement on Movement and Access, signed almost a year ago. The international community, on its part, must intensify its efforts to provide emergency relief to the Palestinian people in order to alleviate its suffering.

The long history of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict shows us that military operations or terrorist acts are not the right way to achieve a just and lasting solution based on the notion of two independent and sovereign States living side by side in peace and security. The path of violence will only increase the resentment and mutual mistrust and will strengthen extremist sectors.

We are fully convinced that the only path is that of peace negotiations based on the resolutions of this Council, the Madrid terms of reference, the principle of land for peace and the Arab Peace Initiative of Beirut. The international community, in particular the Quartet and the Security Council, should assume a more proactive role, with the aim of assisting the parties to resume such negotiations and to put an end to the vicious cycle of killings, revenge and reprisals that have darkened the Middle East in recent times.

Our responsibility is to act in an urgent manner, and we must do it to the benefit of all peoples of the region.

With respect to the draft resolution that is being elaborated by the delegation of Qatar, we will put forth our proposals, and we hope that it will be adopted by the Security Council.

Mr. Shinyo (Japan): I join other colleagues in thanking you for organizing this meeting and also thank Assistant Secretary-General Angela Kane for her comprehensive briefing on the latest events in the situation in the Middle East.

The situation in the Middle East concerning Palestine and Israel continues to present critical challenges. We have expressed our concern about the continuing fighting between Israel and Palestinian military groups in Gaza, as well as the many casualties caused by the fighting since the abduction of Corporal Gilad Shalit at the end of June.

We are gravely disturbed by the report of many new casualties in Beit Hanoun as the result of an Israeli military action yesterday. We express our condolences to the families of the victims. This incident is not only a worrying development from the humanitarian perspective, but also has a negative political impact. It is necessary for all parties concerned to exercise maximum restraint in order to avoid further aggravation of the situation.

Japan strongly calls upon the Government of Israel, in particular, to avoid any action that may lead to civilian casualties. We also hope that the Government of Israel will make serious efforts to determine the causes of the incident and to prevent the recurrence of such a tragic incident, in particular through the work of the investigatory panel established in the Israeli Defense Forces.

We urge the Government of the Palestinian Authority to take appropriate measures to bring an immediate end to violence by the Palestinian extremist groups, including rocket attacks against Israel. We also reiterate our call on the Palestinian Government to make every possible effort to secure the immediate release of the Israeli soldiers abducted in June.

Mr. Tatsuo Arima, Special Envoy of the Government of Japan for the Middle East Peace Process, is currently in the Middle East, visiting Israel, Palestine and Syria. Mr. Arima is appealing for an end to the state of confrontation as mentioned above and is carrying out consultations to encourage parties to make further and more constructive efforts for the promotion of peace in the Middle East.

Japan strongly hopes that the recent efforts for the establishment of a new Palestinian Government will continue. To break the current stalemate, we urge Palestinians to find ways to overcome their differences and support a new Government of the Palestinian Authority, which will renew its efforts to achieve coexistence and mutual prosperity with Israel. If the Palestinian Authority makes clear that it will pursue the realization of peace through peaceful negotiation with Israel then the international community should actively extend its support for such a policy. We expect that Israel will support and respond positively to the efforts of President Abbas that are aimed at achieving a breakthrough.

The deteriorating humanitarian situation of the Palestinians is a matter of deep concern to our Government. We reiterate the importance for the international community, including Israel, to continue to provide the needed assistance in order to address the situation. In this regard, we stress that an early resumption by the Israeli Government of the transfer of tax and customs revenues to the Palestinian Authority, as well as the full implementation of the Agreement on Movement and Access, concluded in November 2005, are matters of the utmost priority.

For our part, we have been steadily implementing our pledge of $25 million in humanitarian assistance to the Palestinian people, made upon the visit of former Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi to Palestine in July. At the same time, we are making efforts to realize the creation of a corridor for peace and prosperity, which aims at facilitating coexistence and mutual prosperity in the region in the mid- to long-term, through consultations among Government representatives of the four parties concerned — Israel, Palestine, Jordan and Japan. We have dispatched a study mission to the region and are making efforts to implement the plan.

Japan will continue to cooperate with the international community in achieving the mitigation of tensions and the restoration of stability in the region.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I will now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of Peru.

I would like to begin by thanking Mrs. Angela Kane, Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs, for the valuable information she presented to the Council.

The Government of Peru has condemned the attack by members of the Israeli Defense Forces committed in the morning of Wednesday, 8 November, in the Gaza residential area of Beit Hanoun that resulted in the deaths of Palestinian civilians, including eight children and seven women. That event is part of the violent events in that area since last week. In addition to the victims among the civilian population and the damage to infrastructure, the military action underway is having an impact on the peace process in the Middle East as a whole. The right of any State to defend itself — in this case against the continuous and unacceptable launching of rockets — does not justify the disproportionate use of force, which is counter to international humanitarian law.

The ongoing occupation of Palestinian territory by Israel and its repeated acts of aggression against civilian targets are eroding the only platform on which it is possible to reach a lasting solution, to be established pursuant to Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 1397 (2002), the earlier agreements between the parties and the Road Map.

The recent war in Lebanon should teach us a lesson about the risks inherent in allowing a conflict to intensify because of a lack of dialogue between the parties, and a delay in the resolution of substantive issues on which a lasting settlement of differences could be based.

We must bear in mind that it is essential to promote the internal cohesion of the political regime in Palestine, and that it must comply with the requirements expressed by the Quartet. Problems of governance make action to impede attacks from Gaza even more difficult, even though such attacks against Israeli targets are unacceptable.

Similarly, the lack of governability has made it impossible to achieve the release of the Israeli soldier who was kidnapped on 25 June, as well as to put an end to the supply of illicit weapons to the interior of Gaza. The current complex situation makes it more

urgent than ever to return to the peaceful path contained in the Road Map, as outlined by the Quartet and supported by the Security Council in resolution 1515 (2003). That is the only path that can realize the goal of two democratic States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security. It requires a dialogue among all of the parties to the conflict, simultaneously, so that progress on one negotiating track is not undermined by regression on others.

To that end, Peru urges all parties involved to put an end to all acts of violence, to abide by the standards of international humanitarian law and to resume the dialogue in order to bring the peace process back to life. The international community must constructively support that process in order to reduce tension, restore stability and achieve a fair and lasting solution.

I now resume my duties as President of the Council.

I now give the floor to the representative of Cuba.

Mr. Malmierca Díaz (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): Allow me to congratulate you, Sir, on your assumption of the presidency of the Council and to wish you success in your difficult task.

Once again, the Council is meeting to examine the serious situation in the Middle East, including the question of Palestine. We were all horrified at the massacre yesterday in the Gaza Strip that resulted in the deaths of 19 innocent Palestinian civilians, including women and children. My delegation offers its most sincere condolences to the families of the victims.

Yesterday's events in Beit Hanoun are just one more example of what has been suffered for much too long by the Palestinian people as a result of the illegal occupation of its territory by Israel, the occupying Power. The Non-Aligned Movement responded immediately to the events taking place in the occupied Palestinian territory by requesting the convening of this emergency meeting of the Security Council.

In my capacity as Chair of the Coordinating Bureau of the Non-Aligned Movement and on behalf of all member States of the Movement, I have the honour to read to the Council the following statement on the deterioration of the current situation in the Middle East, especially the occupied Palestinian territory. This statement was agreed this morning by the Coordinating Bureau of the Non-Aligned Movement.

(*spoke in English*)

"The Coordinating Bureau of the Non-Aligned Movement expresses once again its grave concern at the continued deterioration of the situation on the ground in the occupied Palestinian territory, during the recent period, particularly as a result of the excessive, indiscriminate and disproportionate use of force by Israel, the occupying Power, which has caused extensive loss of civilian Palestinian life and injuries, including among children and women.

"The Movement condemns in particular the military assaults being carried out by Israel, the occupying Power in the Gaza Strip, which has caused loss of life and extensive destruction of Palestinian property and vital infrastructure. The Movement reaffirms the continued validity of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 446 (1979), 1322 (2000), 1397 (2002), 1402 (2002), 1403 (2002), 1435 (2002), 1515 (2003) and 1553 (2004).

"The Movement emphasizes the need to preserve the institutions of the Palestinian National Authority and Palestinian infrastructure and properties.

"The Movement expresses grave concern at the dire humanitarian situation of the Palestinian people and calls for the provision of emergency assistance to them.

"In light of the present situation, the Movement urges the Security Council to shoulder its responsibility according to the United Nations Charter in the preservation of international peace and security by taking the following measures:

"1. Demanding that Israel, the occupying Power, immediately cease its aggression against the Palestinian civilian population in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, and immediately withdraw its forces from within the Gaza Strip to positions prior to June 2006;

"2. Calling for an immediately ceasefire between the Israeli and Palestinian sides;

"3. Calling also for the establishment and dispatch of a United Nations observer force to supervise the ceasefire;

"4. Calling upon Israel, the occupying Power, to scrupulously abide by its obligations and responsibilities under the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, of 12 August 1949.

"In that regard, the Movement calls upon the international community, including the Quartet, to take immediate steps, including confidence-building measures between the parties, with the objective of resuming peace negotiations and restarting the peace process.

"The Movement will remain seized of this important issue."

(*spoke in Spanish*)

Thus concludes the statement of the Coordinating Bureau of the Non-Aligned Movement, which will shortly be distributed as an official document of the General Assembly and of the Security Council.

I should like to conclude by calling on all members of the Security Council to support the draft resolution submitted by the delegation of Qatar on behalf of the members of the Group of Arab States. We hope that the Council will be able to act without delay, in keeping with its important responsibilities.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now call on the representative of Finland.

Ms. Lintonen (Finland): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union. The following countries — Albania, Bulgaria, Croatia, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Moldova, Montenegro, Romania, Serbia, The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Turkey and Ukraine — align themselves with this statement.

The European Union is deeply concerned by the escalating violence in Gaza and the West Bank. In particular, we are shocked by the large number of civilian deaths and injuries caused by the shelling of Beit Hanoun by the Israel Defense Forces on Wednesday. We deeply regret the growing number of civilian casualties, many of them children, as well as the destruction of houses and other civilian infrastructure.

While recognizing Israel's legitimate right to self-defence, we urge Israel to exercise the utmost restraint and underline that action should not be disproportionate or in contradiction to international humanitarian law. We call on Israel to end its incursion into Gaza. It is imperative that the humanitarian conditions of the Palestinian people be urgently alleviated.

The European Union also calls on the Palestinian leadership to bring an end to the firing of rockets on Israeli territory. The deterioration of the situation will only aggravate the already grave circumstances in the region, where a return to a comprehensive peace process with a clear political perspective is urgently needed.

The time has come for all parties to fulfil their responsibilities. The present stalemate must be urgently brought to an end, and a process of dialogue must be opened.

To achieve that, an immediate cessation of violence is imperative. The process of reconciliation among Palestinians must be given a chance. We urge the Palestinians to continue their efforts to form a Government of national unity with a platform reflecting the Quartet principles and allowing for early engagement.

The European Union reiterates its intention to actively contribute to the work within the Quartet to get the Middle East peace process urgently back on track in order to make progress towards a comprehensive settlement on the basis of the Road Map, the relevant Security Council resolutions and the commitments made at Sharm el-Sheikh in 2005. The international community must provide its full support to the parties in that respect.

This terrible violence clearly underlines once again that there can be no military or unilateral solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The only way forward for Israel and the Palestinians is the negotiation of a viable two-State solution. All parties have a clear duty to act now to revive a credible peace process and to avoid further tragedies such as those witnessed in Beit Hanoun.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now call on the representative of Yemen.

Mr. Alsaidi (Yemen) (*spoke in Arabic*): On the morning of Wednesday, 8 November 2006, the peoples of the world, together with the remaining inhabitants of beleaguered Beit Hanoun in Palestine, were shocked to awaken to the sight of scattered body parts, houses razed to the ground and squares drenched with blood and filled with the remains of children, the elderly and

women — a surreal, abhorrent, alarming and painful scene rejected and despised by any sane human being. That scene resulted from Operation Autumn Clouds, in which the occupying Israeli forces rained artillery shells down on the residential areas of Beit Hanoun, a densely populated village with innocent and defenceless elderly persons, women and children. It was a horrific war crime against the rights of the Palestinians and of humanity as a whole — a barbaric act that runs counter to any rational, logical or legal justification other than the desire of Israel, the occupying Power, to continue a systematic war of genocide, targeting humans, trees and animals and all forms of life. The question now is: will the international community stand idly by in the face of this brutal massacre?

The Republic of Yemen, while expressing its deep concern and strong condemnation of those barbaric acts, calls upon all members of the family of nations, including the Security Council, to take a firm stand against the State terrorism carried out by the Israeli occupation forces so that they halt their ceaseless violations of the rights of the Palestinian people, who have been subjected for more than half a century to all kinds of repression, oppression, injustice, coercion and torture.

We believe that the Council's inability to take practical deterrent measures that prevent the recurrence of aggression — which would further inflame the already burning situation in the region and broaden the cycle of violence there — and the Council's hesitation to take decisive steps to silence the tanks, artillery, helicopters and Israeli jets targeting a defenceless, imprisoned people living in an open jail, crying out in deteriorating conditions of poverty and destitution, have given rise to a double blockade. One blockade has been imposed on the Palestinian people for quite some time by the occupation authorities, who disregard the moral norms set out in the instruments of international law, and the other is an international blockade that has increased desperation and suffering since the Palestinian elections at the beginning of 2006.

If the situation continues to deteriorate, it will lay fertile ground for extremism and terrorism and stifle the voices of wisdom, reason and moderation. It will also lead to chaos, instability and grave consequences. My country therefore believes that it is now essential for the Council, which is responsible for the maintenance of international peace and security, to adopt a binding resolution on an immediate ceasefire and the dispatch of an international observer force to monitor that ceasefire and protect Palestinian civilians. It must also make a serious political effort to return the parties to the negotiating table, in accordance with international resolutions, the Arab initiative, and mutually concluded agreements.

Mr. Abdelaziz (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): The Security Council is meeting today at a time when the Palestinian territories are experiencing a continued escalation by the Israeli occupying forces and an intensification of Israeli military attacks against the Gaza Strip. Tens of civilians — mostly women and children — were killed and injured yesterday in Beit Hanoun in northern Gaza, in blatant violation by Israel of all international laws and norms and of its commitments as an occupying Power under the Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Times of War. That has undermined the credibility of Israel's commitment to the goal of reaching a just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East based on international legitimacy and to refraining from imposing de facto policies.

The warning delivered by the Arab Group's foreign ministers during the Security Council ministerial meeting of 21 September has become a reality. It has been reinforced by the Security Council's silence and unwillingness to assume its responsibilities in maintaining international peace and security and in enhancing world supervision of the peace process so as to avoid a further deterioration of the situation and limit the possibility of further escalation in the region. Accordingly, it is incumbent on the Council to act and to refrain from condoning Israel's violations and illegal practices in the occupied lands, particularly in the Gaza Strip, where the killing, the blockade, closures, and the bloodshed of innocent unarmed civilians continue unabated.

Events of the past few months in Palestine and Lebanon have proven the failure of hostile policies and unilateral measures, and confirmed that a solution can be attained solely at the negotiating table, the only way to achieve peace and security between the Arabs and the Israelis. On that basis, the mere condemnation of the hostilities is not sufficient to make Israel comply and refrain from its aggression. The international community must therefore take a firm stand in order to put an end to the ongoing political and humanitarian tragedy and to provide the bases and necessary

guarantees to halt the ongoing disregard of United Nations resolutions, international law, the road map, and the role of the Quartet. In that context, the following urgent measures should be taken.

First, Israel, the occupying Power, has to immediately cease its aggression against the defenceless Palestinian people, stop the killing of civilians in the occupied lands, withdraw from the areas that it entered in the Gaza Strip, and return to the boundaries of 28 June 2006.

Second, Israel should lift the blockade imposed on the Palestinian lands and take definitive confidence-building measures, including by refraining from targeting civilians and halting all forms violence and collective punishment; by addressing the deteriorating humanitarian conditions in Gaza and the West Bank; by discontinuing the construction of the separation wall; and by implementing the Agreement on Movement and Access to ease the movement of Palestinians and allow the delivery of international humanitarian assistance to resume.

Third, Israel should abstain from unilateral measures that contribute to the protraction of the conflict and prevent a final settlement from being reached. It should also make serious efforts to build confidence and resume negotiations in a context of simultaneous parallel commitments from the Palestinian side to stop the launching of rockets from the Palestinian territories towards Israel and the cessation of all Israeli military operations.

Fourth, the need to create an atmosphere conducive to a return to negotiations should be recognized through the release of the abducted Israeli soldier, and of the Palestinian prisoners, officials and parliamentarians arrested by Israel, taking into account the importance of such a step to the re-establishment of calm.

Fifth, the Security Council has to assume the responsibilities that it has abandoned, achieve an immediate and mutual ceasefire between the two sides through an international monitoring mechanism to be established under the auspices of the Security Council, and ensure the cessation of aggression and the non-resumption of actions by Israel against Palestinian civilians.

Sixth, if Israel is to be made to understand that it cannot continue to violate the human rights of Palestinians and to occupy their lands with impunity, its practices in the occupied Palestinian territories must be investigated and it must be assigned criminal responsibility for the destruction that has resulted from its aggression.

Seventh, immediate and effective action and measures should be taken by the international community, including the Security Council and the members of the Quartet, to address the Palestinian issue and the deteriorating situation in the Middle East. It must not be content to issue statements that do not reflect definitive positions vis-à-vis flagrant violations.

In conclusion, we condemn the aggression, which cannot be justified under any pretext or label, and reiterate our call on Israel to refrain from using force to impose a de facto situation and to return to the negotiating table. We also reiterate our call on the Security Council, the Quartet, and all Members of the United Nations to strive earnestly to end the occupation and establish the foundations of peace in the Middle East, which has long suffered from conflict. We emphasize that the Arab countries, in their peace initiative of 2002, set out a strong position that still awaits support from the Security Council and needs to be reflected in practical initiatives and procedures to achieve the security, peace and stability to which the people of the region aspire.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I give the floor to the representative of Saudi Arabia.

Mr. Shobokshi (Saudi Arabia) (*spoke in Arabic*): Allow me to join those who preceded me in congratulating you, Sir, on your assumption of the presidency of the Council for this month. We are convinced that you will guide our work capably and wisely. We also wish to thank you and the Security Council for your prompt response to our call for a meeting.

We commend your predecessor, the Ambassador of Japan, who skilfully and distinctively presided over the Council's work last month.

The delegation of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia associates itself with the statements made by the representatives of Qatar on behalf of the League of Arab States, Cuba on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement, and Azerbaijan on behalf of the Organization of the Islamic Conference.

Through the carnage it is wreaking in the Gaza Strip, Israel has again called attention to its bloody nature and inhuman approach. Yesterday, it carried out yet another massacre in Beit Hanoun, killing tens of civilians, most of whom were women and children. Israeli occupation forces fired 11 shells on 6 houses from tanks surrounding the city, from which they had withdrawn the day before yesterday. Those shells struck people while they slept, tearing them apart and mixing their blood with Palestinian soil.

That barbaric Israeli attack cannot be justified as self-defence; it was unjustified revenge. Nowhere in the Charter of the United Nations is there a reference to revenge. This is an act of aggression that cannot be justified by international law. Even those few who have justified revenge as an act of deterrence have qualified that position by saying that revenge must be proportionate to the initial crime.

The excessive and indiscriminate use of Israeli military power and the inhuman practices of the occupation forces fall under the category of repression and collective punishment against the Palestinian people, whose land is occupied and whose rights are usurped. Israel's barbaric attacks against Palestinian civilians, including the killing of women, children and the elderly, run counter to all international laws and norms and are clear and flagrant violations of international law and the relevant provisions of the 1949 Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War.

Israel has created an atmosphere of death inside the occupied Palestinian territory. That has led many to equate the value of life and death, given that there are no prospects for the future to give Palestinians hope or an alternative to the peace process that has been aborted by successive Israeli Governments. Those with influence on the peace process have no interest in intervening to put an end to the bloodshed in occupied Palestinian territories. That bloodshed will lead to more violence, because all hope has disappeared from the lives of Palestinians. They have lost their livelihood and human dignity.

All of that will only lead to generations filled with hate, desperation and the desire to avenge. Israel will be responsible for that. Inaction by the international community and the fact that the Security Council has ignored the repeated massacres perpetrated by Israel and allowed acts of aggression and occupation to replace justice and rule of law, only serves to encourage Israel to deny the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people to self-determination and to establish an independent State with East Jerusalem as its capital.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia strongly condemns the massacre perpetrated yesterday by Israel in Beit Hanoun, as well as others throughout occupied Palestine, which have led to the deaths and injury of dozens of women, children and other innocent civilians. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia reiterates its call on the international community to act quickly to put an end to acts of aggression against innocent Palestinians, as well as to revive the peace process in conformity with the Arab peace initiative and internationally binding resolutions. The Kingdom warns of the grave consequences that could result from assaults on the peace process. We also underscore the fact that it is necessary to urgently convene an international conference that includes all parties with a view to ending such horrible massacres and providing protection to the Palestinian people.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Lebanon.

Ms. Ziade (Lebanon) (*spoke in Arabic*): Allow me at the outset to congratulate you, Mr. President, on your assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for this month. I would also like to thank Ms. Angela Kane for her briefing on developments in the situation in the occupied Palestinian territories.

As if the complete air, land and naval blockade on Gaza was not enough, as if it were not enough that last summer's so-called Israeli withdrawal from the Gaza Strip was a mere pretext to turn the entire Gaza Strip into a prison for the Palestinian people, as if the ongoing daily acts of aggression against innocent Palestinians were not enough, as if the daily scenes on Western television of Palestinian deaths and blood were not enough — as if all of that and Israel's other daily actions against the Palestinian people were not enough, Israel yesterday launched a new military operation to shed the blood of more Palestinian women, children and elderly persons, destroying all hope for peace and a life of dignity for an entire people.

Words of condemnation no longer rise to the magnitude of Israel's actions. The international community, and the Security Council in particular, can

no longer stand by as spectators watching this unjust and protracted tragedy. Israel's acts of aggression, killing of dozens of innocent Palestinian victims, firing on peaceful women demonstrators and the massacre at Beit Hanoun, as well as its use of internationally banned weapons and its destruction of Palestinian civilian infrastructure, require invoking the vast wealth of civilized human laws and rules, agreements and moral precepts to end such acts of aggression.

In the light of what is taking place, we wish to underscore the fact that there is an urgent need to put an end to Israeli aggression. The Council must adopt a resolution that demands that Israel end its military activities, that puts in place a mechanism to ensure that it in fact does end those activities, and that establishes a commission to investigate the Beit Hanoun massacre. Such a resolution would not contradict the work of the Quartet; rather it will complement it and lend it momentum while increasing the credibility of the efforts of the international community to put an end to daily Israeli massacres. It may also serve to open a window that would make it possible to adopt a serious approach to peace in Palestine and the entire Middle East region.

The positive developments taking place in southern Lebanon following the adoption of resolution 1701 (2006) have been first and foremost due to the support of the international community and the full commitment of the Government of Lebanon to honour its obligations and responsibilities. The Lebanese army has now been deployed in the south of the country. The Special Representative of the Secretary-General has described our cooperation with UNIFIL as excellent. The Government of Lebanon has deployed 8,600 troops along the Lebanese border to strengthen the observation mechanisms. The Government has repeatedly denied all allegations by Israel that arms are being smuggled into the country.

It is unacceptable that resolution 1701 (2006) be reduced to meaning solely the release of the two Israeli soldiers. The resolution aims primarily at ending all acts of aggression against Lebanon. It also seeks to assist the Government of Lebanon to exercise its sovereignty and power over all of its territory. Israel is daily violating our sovereignty by violating Lebanese airspace.

As if that were not enough, Israeli military planes fly at high and low altitudes over German and French naval vessels, in total violation of Israel's commitment to abide by the provisions of resolution 1701 (2006) and the role and authority of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon. It is the joint responsibility of both parties to implement resolution 1701 (2006), and we therefore call in this forum on the Israeli party to abide by its commitments and to assume its responsibilities vis-à-vis the international community.

We commend the steadfastness of the Palestinian people and their tenacity in clinging to their land in the face of the Israeli military machine, which is daily endeavouring to wipe them out. The time for peace has come. The Madrid Conference, the relevant resolutions of the international community and the Arab Peace Initiative adopted at Beirut in 2002 all are good bases for bringing about the just, lasting and comprehensive peace to which the peoples of the region aspire. It is our hope that the Council will seek to relaunch that initiative in enhancement of international peace and security and as a contribution to building a prosperous future without extremism for coming generations in the region.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I call on the representative of Malaysia.

Mr. Hamidon (Malaysia): Let me begin by associating myself with the statement delivered by the representative of Cuba on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement and with the statement to be delivered by Azerbaijan on behalf of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC).

My delegation endorses the statement delivered by the representative of Qatar on behalf of the Group of Arab States and by the Permanent Observer of Palestine. My delegation would like to expand on one point touched on in those statements, namely the establishment and deployment of a United Nations observer or peacekeeping force to the occupied Palestinian territory.

The establishment and deployment of a United Nations force to the occupied Palestinian territory is a proposal that has been before the Council for almost four decades. My delegation believes that, under the present circumstances of heightened tension, only the forcible separation of the two sides would be able to provide the necessary peace and security that would be conducive to the resumption of negotiations aimed at a political settlement.

Malaysia, along with other countries, has long urged the Security Council to establish a strong interposing international protection mechanism which would have the immediate effect of defusing the explosive situation on the ground and instilling confidence in the two sides. My delegation therefore urges once again that a robust international protection force be deployed without further delay. We cannot afford to let the violence spiral out of control or allow this conflict to remain unresolved indefinitely.

The Security Council is well aware of the details of the United Nations force proposal, which had also been recommended by the Secretary-General. Unfortunately, the repeated calls made in the past for the Council to consider that proposal have been met with resistance. Consequently, thousands of defenceless Palestinian civilians, including women and children, have been, and will continue to be, killed or wounded and their property and infrastructure destroyed as a result of the relentless acts of aggression and the excessive and indiscriminate use of force by Israel, the occupying Power, in a business-as-usual fashion.

In retaliating against the occupation and aggression, acts by Palestinian militants have wrongfully led to Israeli civilian casualties and to the destruction of their property. If such acts are considered legitimate under those circumstances, then I am afraid that we have returned to the long gone dark ages of our ancestors, and that Council members, oblivious to their responsibilities under the Charter, are sitting here in this Chamber seemingly endorsing those war crimes and crimes against humanity.

My delegation continues to recognize the important role of the diplomatic Quartet. The road map and the two-State solution envisaged therein, among others, have provided real hope for peace. Given the current situation on the ground and the steadily deteriorating overall situation in the region, it appears that the three-year-old road map has been deliberately asphyxiated by a Power mightier than the Quartet. It also appears that the road map is nothing more than a piece of paper, just like the Council resolutions on the Palestinian question — excellent in substance but poor in implementation.

My delegation appeals once again to the Council to shoulder its Charter-mandated responsibility for the sake of both the Palestinians and the Israelis, for the sake of peace and security in the region and the world at large, and for humanity. While serious efforts to resuscitate the Middle East peace process are being made, establishing and deploying a United Nations force without further delay in the occupied Palestinian territories is an option that the Council should seriously consider.

My delegation hopes that the draft resolution that will be presented in due course by the delegation of Qatar on behalf of the OIC and the League of Arab States will serve as a basis in that regard.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): There are a number of speakers remaining on my list for this meeting. I therefore intend, with the concurrence of the members of the Council, to suspend the meeting until 3.15 p.m.

The meeting was suspended at 1.05 p.m.